

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

**Present Status of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker**

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker has been very close to extinction for the past twenty years. The remaining individuals and their immediate forebears, although very few and gradually dwindling in numbers, have been able to persist so long because of the continued survival of a few primeval forests where there are enough old and dying trees to supply food to the woodpeckers. In 1939, at the close of the National Audubon Society's research project on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, the estimated total population of the species was only about twenty-four individuals. These were scattered among remnants of virgin forest in Florida and in Louisiana, not more than six or eight birds being in any one locality. The next few years may decide the fate of the Ivory-bill. The smallness of the nation's reserves of swamp timber, the rising value of lumber, and the present need for many kinds of raw materials may bring destruction to its habitat and thus end the species.

There are now only three places which appear to offer any chance for the survival of Ivory-bills. In only one of these—the Singer Tract—are Ivory-bills known certainly to occur, although there is reason to believe that there are a few individuals in the other two. Further, the Singer Tract is now in the process of being destroyed.

The Singer Tract, by all odds the most important remaining Ivory-bill habitat, is an area of virgin timber in northeastern Louisiana, a forest remarkable for its richness of plant and animal life. Ivory-bills have inhabited it for many years; they have been studied and observed there more than in any other place; and more of the birds are there than in any other known habitat. In recent years there have been from six to eight Ivory-bills living in what was left of the virgin timber.

Within the last three or four years a large lumber company acquired control of the tract and began logging the forest. Up to last year most of the cutting was done in parts of the tract not inhabited by Ivory-bills; however, the territory of one pair was logged over, after which the pair disappeared. Last summer logging was started in another part of the forest inhabited by Ivory-bills; it was interrupted by winter rains before so much damage was done as to drive the birds away, but the work will be continued when conditions permit. There is little doubt but that complete logging of the tract will cause the end of the Ivory-bills there, and since the surrounding country is young second-growth forest and cultivated lands, it will doom the woodpeckers to a vain search for suitable food and habitat.

Discussions are being carried on with officials of the company controlling the tract to determine what might be done for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Present conditions make it unlikely that much can be done now, but one of the best parts of the tract, from the viewpoint of conservation, will probably be the last to be logged, and the condition of the nation may change enough and in time to allow the saving of that part.

The only two other areas where Ivory-billed Woodpeckers may be conserved are both in Florida. One is in the bottomlands of the Apalachicola River and the other is the Big Cypress region of southern Florida. Nothing is positively known about the presence of Ivory-bills in these, but the evidence indicates that a few of the birds inhabit both localities. There should be increased interest in these two regions because they are both wilderness areas and unusual habitats for wildlife. Of the two, the Big Cypress is the least likely to be changed by logging or any other activity and so the most likely to be the place where Ivory-bills will survive. It is one of the few remaining primitive areas in eastern United States

and probably will remain so for some time. For that very reason immediate efforts should be made for its preservation, for they will have a better chance of succeeding if carried out before rising prices for timber and other resources make the region profitable to commercial interests.

The future of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is far from bright, but there is still a chance for its survival if we can plan well enough ahead.—James T. Tanner.

#### Conservation Notes from Canada

Although bird lovers and ornithologists usually appreciate birds, bird sanctuaries, and bird conservation for good reasons other than the strictly economic, it is undeniable that in advancing conservation work, particularly in obtaining the support of that large part of the population that, without special stimulation, realizes no interest in such activities, sound economic arguments are very useful.

The well-known Canadian Bird Sanctuary at Bonaventure Island and Percé Rock, at the east end of the Gaspé Peninsula, established by both the Dominion Government and the Province of Quebec, consists chiefly of rocky cliffs inhabited by Gannets, Atlantic Murres, Razor-billed Auks, Double-crested Cormorants, Herring Gulls, and other non-game birds, yet annually justifies itself as a valuable



A section of the Gannet colony in Bonaventure Island Bird Sanctuary, Quebec. This photograph, taken in May, 1940, by the Canadian National Parks Service, shows how increase of these birds under protection is causing them to invade the pasture above the cliff.

economic asset because of its attraction for tourists. During 1941 Percé was visited by about 20,000 tourists, of whom about 14,000 circumnavigated Bonaventure Island in local motorboats. Local income derived from this tourist traffic was in the neighborhood of \$120,000. Fortunately the birds in this sanctuary, though easily observed, are so protected by the cliffs from close contact with the public that unlimited numbers of well-comported visitors can enjoy them without causing harmful disturbance.

Canadian regulations under The Migratory Birds Convention Act prohibit hunting migratory game birds on baited areas or by the use or aid of baiting. In some places there developed a practice of having grain placed in the water (which is not unlawful) by landowners or those acting for them, with subsequent hunting of ducks by other persons, who, when prosecuted, claimed entire ignorance of the presence of the grain. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are meeting this practice by searching for grain in suspected places and, if any is found, posting the area for the rest of the season with official signs that read as follows: "Warning. Baiting with grain has been done in this vicinity. Hunting of wild ducks, wild geese, or other migratory game birds on this area or of any such birds attracted to the vicinity by such baiting is unlawful. Unauthorized removal, damaging, or destruction of this sign is prohibited. Penalties, \$10 to \$300 fine, or imprisonment up to six months, or both fine and imprisonment under the Migratory Birds Convention Act. National Parks Bureau." This method is proving very effective.—Harrison F. Lewis.

### Prairie Grouse

"There is some doubt as to the fate of the sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chicken in northern North Dakota. Recently introduced soil conservation practices have done much to improve cover, but the tolerance of these native grouse to the rapidly increasing pheasant and Hungarian partridge populations in this area is yet to be determined. During the hunting season all three birds are frequently flushed from the same aspen-rimmed pot-holes at one time. Whether this close association can successfully exist during the nesting season is a question." (*Wild-life News*, October 15, 1941: 10)

In comparison with other game birds, Prairie Chickens and Sharptails have been given rather little study in the past. Since Pittman-Robertson money has become available, however, there has been a marked increase in the number of states in which research on one or both is under way. The list now includes: Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota, Montana, Colorado, and Utah. Small refuges (but without accompanying research) have recently been purchased by Iowa, Idaho, and New Mexico.

One race of Prairie Chickens—the Heath Hen—has become extinct; the Att-water Prairie Chicken is now limited to about ten per cent of its former range and is in critical condition numerically; the Greater Prairie Chicken has lost most of the southern part of its original range, and has been displaced to the north. The Lesser Prairie Chicken occurs now in only about half of its original range. Sharp-tails have fared considerably better, but show an even more complete loss of the southern part of their range. One race, the Columbian Sharp-tail, is threatened with extinction.

Both Prairie Chickens and Sharp-tails, then, have suffered great loss of range; both have nearly disappeared from the southern parts of their original ranges, and have been displaced to the north; each is now tremendously reduced in numbers. In each case, the most obvious cause of the decline has been the destruction of habitat. Over-hunting has also contributed. Habitat destruction on the original

range was accomplished by agricultural development; the removal of agriculture and subsequent brush invasion have now taken away much of the acquired range to the north. Forest plantings have further reduced the northern range, particularly in the Lake States (see "Timber vs. Wildlife," L. A. Davenport, *Jour. of Forestry*, 39, 1941: 661-666), and improved fire protection is hastening the loss of still more.

It is well that the prairie grouse are now being studied on a wider front. Their general requirements are by no means understood as yet, and no one state contains a complete cross-section of the specific problems involved. Pheasant competition, perhaps of major importance in the North Central States, is no problem in the South; over-grazing, so important in the South and West, cuts a minor figure in the Lake States; forest plantations and brush invasion are of more critical importance in the Lake States than elsewhere.—F.N.H.

#### Trumpeter Swans: a Correction

In the last issue of the *Bulletin*, Trumpeter Swan population figures for the last eight years were quoted from *Wildlife News*. Those figures refer only to Trumpeter Swan populations in the United States, although the quotation did not so specify. There are thought to be about 500 more Trumpeter Swans in western Canada.—F. N. H.

#### National Defense and Conservation

In order to protect vital defense secrets and the whereabouts of military installations, the Army has prohibited hunting along many parts of the Pacific coast. It is possible that there will be no open season along the entire coast region.—Leonard Wing.

Albert M. Day has informed us that ". . . the Army has definitely abandoned all plans dealing with the military development at Henry's Lake and West Yellowstone. After the situation as to the possible danger to the Trumpeter Swans was fully presented to them they completely withdrew from the area and took their winter training grounds elsewhere." (Letter, Jan. 20, 1942.)—F.N.H.

#### Committee Notes

Arthur S. Hawkins has asked to be relieved of his duties as a member of the Conservation Committee because of pressure of his Army duties. He is attached to the Medical Corps at Sheppard Field, Texas.

A new member, John W. Handlan of the West Virginia Conservation Commission, Division of Education, has been appointed to the Committee.—F.N.H.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE  
Frederick N. Hamerstrom, Jr., Chairman